

Hursthead Junior School Forest Schools Handbook



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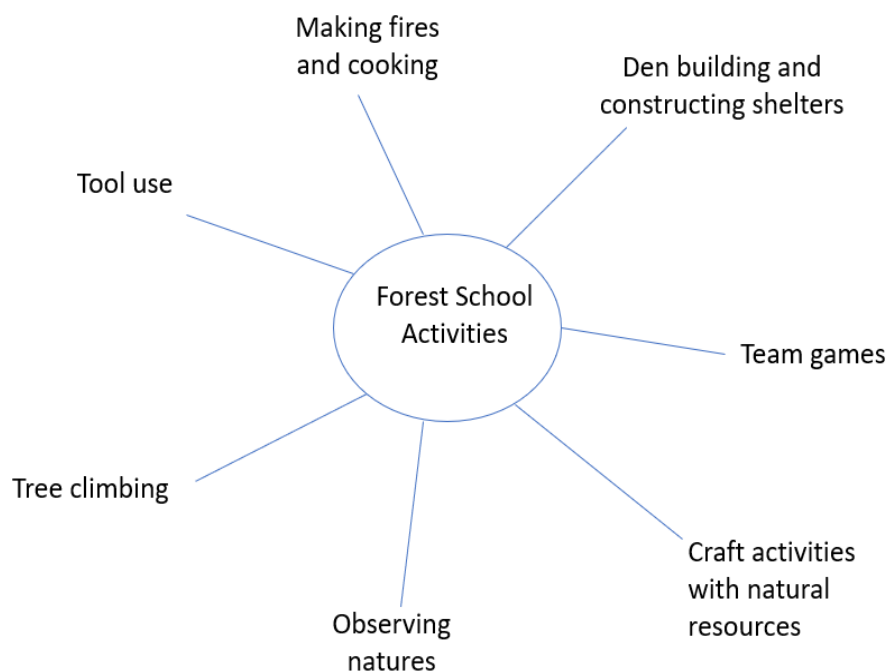
Forest School At Hursthead Junior School

Our Forest School Ethos

Children who take part in Forest Schools at Hursthead are offered an exciting opportunity to develop holistically in the natural environment. Unlike other outdoor learning styles, Forest Schools is child-led, allowing children to develop independence and the freedom to make their own decisions whilst learning new skills.

The Forest School ethos originated in Denmark in the 1950s and was initially practised with pre-school children. It was brought over to the UK when staff from Bridgewater College in Somerset went to Denmark to observe the sessions there. They noticed that the children had greater social skills and could communicate more effectively than other children their age. It was brought back to the UK and is now widely practised in schools across the country.

Each Forest School session at Hursthead is structured to allow children to explore a wide range of experiences and activities. These could include:



There are multiple benefits to the children who participate in these varied activities. These include:

- Enhancing fine and gross motor skills
- Encouraging healthy risk-taking and greater self-awareness
- Developing resilience, increasing self-esteem and self confidence
- Improving communication and collaboration
- Increasing independence
- Supporting knowledge and appreciation of the natural world
- Improving both physical and mental health
- Developing an awareness of the concept of respect – of self, others and the natural environment

The Forest School Site and Boundaries



Forest School is an integral part of the school curriculum. Hursthead Junior School is fortunate enough to have its own Forest School site as part of the school field. Groups are taken along the path (marked in red) to the area of deciduous woodland northeast of the playing field which also incorporates a mound of un-mown grassland where various flora and fauna are encouraged.

The boundaries are marked in blue, and are essentially a triangle. One side is formed by connecting two points: the oak tree behind the stage (1), and a cone in front of a wooded den, halfway down the east side of the field (2). The other two sides are clearly marked by fences.

At the start of the first session the Forest School Leaders will clearly establish the physical boundaries of the Forest School site with the children. Specifically, the children will be shown the oak tree and the cone which form the points of the triangle that creates the site (as shown in the diagram above). It will be explained that they must always stay within this zone for their safety, so that they can be seen by the adults and monitored appropriately. At the start of the subsequent couple of sessions the children will be reminded of the boundaries. As the boundary along one site of the site is a fence the children are also given information about respecting the privacy and property of the school's neighbours who live on the other side of the fence.

A Typical Forest School Session

All sessions start with a "check-in" with the children seated on the logs around the fire circle. Each participant is encouraged to say their name and an animal that ideally starts with the same first letter as their name. They are then asked to give a number from 1 to 10 to indicate their emotional wellbeing.

After the check-in the next activity is usually a group game in which all children are encouraged to participate. This is usually followed by some free time. The session leaders may give information about an activity that they are leading during this time, such as a small craft activity, which the children can choose to take part in or not. In earlier sessions there may be less free time as the Forest School Leaders may need to give a safety talk or a tool talk. For example, there may be a discussion about safe tree climbing. As the sessions develop the amount of free time will increase.

All sessions are concluded with a "check-out" which takes place with the children seated around the fire circle. Children are encouraged to reflect on the session, may be asked about what they have enjoyed or what they would like to do more of next time, and each give a number from 1 to 10 of how they are feeling.

Roles and Responsibilities and Staff to Child Ratios

From September 2023, Forest Schools at Hursthead Junior School will be run by Hannah Findlay and Amy Butler, who are currently working towards their Level 3 Award for Forest School Practitioners. From September 2023, each session will involve 30 children, both Mrs Findlay and Miss Butler, the class teacher and a teaching assistant. Because Forest School Sessions involve more risk in the activities, a higher number of adults is required to maintain safety. The ratios of children to adults is as follows:

During the sessions 15 children : 2 adults

When working with fire 1 child : 1 adult

When working with tools 4 children : 1 adult

Forest School Leaders: Hannah Findlay and Amy Butler



Responsibilities:

- To plan and lead Forest Schools Activities
- To guide the children in every session
- To maintain and clean tools
- To maintain and monitor the forest school site
- Review the schools Forest Schools policies
- Open to learning and improvement through evaluating sessions

Children:

- To respect ourselves
- To respect others
- To respect the environment
- To embrace the activities open to them through Forest Schools

Code of Conduct and Procedures

The safety of the children taking part in Forest School sessions at Hursthead Junior school is of paramount consideration. To reduce the risk of accidents or injuries there are several policies and procedures that are followed.



Clothing, Weather and PPE

To take part in Forest School sessions children must wear clothing appropriate for the weather for their safety and protection. This must include trousers and a long-sleeved top to reduce the risk of scratches and stings. All children must bring waterproof coat and waterproof trousers if possible as the weather can be wet even in the summer months. Their footwear should be sturdy and ideally walking boots or wellies. Old trainers are acceptable. In the summer the children should bring a sunhat and come to school wearing sun cream.

Children will come to school in the school uniform and change into their Forest School clothing in their classroom before the start of the session. They will put on their Forest School boots/shoes once they are outside the building, leaving their spare shoes ready to change into after the session. A tarpaulin will be laid down inside the school building to reduce the likelihood of the carpet becoming dirty.

One of the beauties of Forest School is that it can take place in most weather conditions which enables children to observe the changes in their natural environment over the seasons. For this to be possible it is essential that those taking part are appropriately prepared for the weather and that the Forest School areas is altered to accommodate the weather.

On hot days this would include:	In cold or wet days this would include:
Children wearing sun cream and sunhats	The wearing of sturdy boots to prevent slips in wet or muddy conditions.
Children who suffer from hay fever having taken antihistamines	Waterproof trousers and a waterproof coat to keep dry
Children being sufficiently hydrated before the session and having access to their water bottles in the woodland area.	Hats and gloves in very cold conditions to keep warm
The construction of a shelter using tarpaulin to provide shade if none is available in the trees	The construction of a shelter using tarpaulin to keep dry. The construction of a fire to keep warm

It is the responsibly of the Forest School Leaders to monitor the weather forecast before the session starts to assess whether it can go ahead outside as planned and to monitor the weather whilst outside on an ongoing basis and to carry out a dynamic risk assessment.

In the event of extreme weather conditions (set out below) Forest Schools will not take place in the woodland area. It may be moved on the playground, onto the field, or inside into the hall or classroom. The safety of the children taking part in the session is always of paramount importance.

Extreme weather conditions include:

- High wind which could result in branches falling and debris flying, causing injury.
- Heavy snow which is settling which could result in children slipping and injuring themselves,
- Very low temperatures which could result in hypothermia,
- Thunder and lightning,
- Very high temperatures which could result in heat stroke or heat exhaustion.

On particularly rainy or muddy days, tree climbing becomes more dangerous due to a high risk of slipping. On these days, children will be asked to keep 'feet on the ground'.

Additional PPE (namely gloves) will be required when using tools and fire. This will be provided by school when required and detailed further in the relevant sections below.

Fire

All sessions start at the fire circle and the children walk to this area in a line with an adult at the front. The fire circle is made up of an arrangement of deadwood and logs. The children are told that these pieces of wood should be treated like furniture so should be kept clean and not tampered with or moved. It is explained that children always walk around the fire circle and never across it. They are also advised to slow down when approaching the fire circle to reduce the risk of falling into it. Children are only allowed into the fire circle when invited to do so by an adult. It is explained that this rule is true whether there is a fire lit or not to instil this habit in the children.



- Fires are an important part of Forest Schools and are used in many sessions. All people participating in sessions involving fire must ensure they are doing so in the correct and safe manner.
- Fires will always be made within the 'fire circle', in which logs are arranged 1.5m from where the fire will be made. These logs always remain in place.
- The children are not to enter the 'fire circle' unless invited in by an adult, this includes entering and exiting the log circle area. When leaving their seats, children are advised to step outside the log they are sitting on and walk around the outside. This habit is reinforced by activities and games in all Forest School sessions.
- When invited into the fire circle, for example to cook, or to fuel the fire, children will sit on one of the kneeling mats placed around the fire pit, around 30cm from the fire itself.

- 10 litres of water should be kept near the log circle in case of emergency and a fire first aid kit must be onsite whenever there is a fire.
- When entering and walking near the fire circle area, children must slow down, to prevent any tripping within proximity to the fire.
- Long sleeves and trousers must always be worn, hair must be tied back and any loose clothing/toggles on coats removed or tied up.
- Children must not throw things into the fire.
- If smoke is becoming irritating for individuals, children are advised to close their eyes and cover their nose and mouth with their hand
- If the wind direction is clear, sitting within line of smoke is to be avoided.

Starting Fires

- Fires are always started by an adult, or by a child (if they are deemed responsible enough) under 1 to 1 supervision.
- When near a fire, the “respect position” must be maintained, one knee on the floor, and one foot on the floor. This is to maintain stability and helps the person to get up swiftly, should there be an issue.
- Any long hair or loose items of clothing that might dangle down, e.g. lanyards, must be removed or tucked away.
- Fires will be started using a fire-striker onto cotton wool (or lighting natural material, such as dry leaves) and Vaseline
- Plastics are not to be burned
- The fire must never be left unattended
- Flammable liquids are not to be used on the fire
- Fires must not be started in strong winds
- The fire must always remain in the fire pit
- When putting fuel onto the fire, heatproof gloves must always be worn
- Fuel must be placed onto the fire from the side and allowed to fall into the middle
- Putting hands straight over the fire is to be avoided
- Fires should be appropriate size for purpose

Extinguishing Fires

- Fires must be extinguished at the end of every session
- Fuel should be burned down to ash if time allows
- Water should be poured into the firepit, completely covering any fuel, and stirred to ensure that no embers remain
- The water and ashes then will be poured at the edge of the site, spreading the waste out to ensure decomposition.

Tool use

During the Forest Schools sessions, different tools will be introduced to the children. Each tool has a separate procedure as set out below which details the PPE required, how it is used safely and what activity it is used for. The safe storage and maintenance of the tools will be the responsibility of the adults. As part of Forest Schools, children are instructed on how to use a variety of tools. When they are being used, children are always closely supervised by a Forest School Leader.

All tools should be counted and checked for working order at the beginning and end of every session. Each tool should have an appropriate designated spot where it is stored when not in use. These designated spots will be in boxes or bags. All tools are to be kept in a locked shed when not out for forest school sessions. Tools must only be used for their specific purpose. Children should never be allowed to help themselves to tools or take them anywhere other than the designated 'tool area' without adult supervision. All adults must also model right use and storage of tools. When using a tool, the user must be an arms span and the tool's length away from others to ensure a safe working space. Children must never run when transporting a tool.



- Keep tools clean and in good working order
- Check tools are safe before and after sessions
- Carry out tool maintenance (such as cleaning and sharpening) once a term
- Tools with any broken or loose parts must not be used
- Any tools with blunt blades must not be used until the tool is sharpened

Bow Saw

- For cutting wood with a diameter larger than a 2p piece
- When not in use, place in the designated tool bag
- Keep the blade covered when not in use
- When transporting, hold the handle with the blade facing down, like a handbag
- Wear a tool glove on the 'helping hand', the hand not holding the tool.
- Keep the 'helping hand' securely holding the wood in place, with a tool table or log holder if needed.
- If the bow saw is large, two people can operate it, one person holds either end of the saw and both people hold the wood in place. Both people must wear gloves on the helping hands.
- Saw with the full length of the blade, making light easy strokes, trying not to use too much force.

Loppers

- For cutting wood with a diameter smaller than a 2p piece
- When not in use, lock blades closed
- Do not exceed the cutting capacity of the tool
- When transporting, keep the blades closed, put both handles under one arm, pass the tool both handles first
- Both hands always hold the tool, so gloves are not needed
- Loppers can also be used with a partner, but the partner must wear gloves on both hands as they are not holding the tool.
- Use with both hands and away from the body

Secateurs

- For cutting wood with a diameter smaller than a 2p piece
- When not in use, lock blades closed
- Do not exceed the cutting capacity of the tool
- When transporting, keep blades closed and pointing downwards. Pass the tool handles first.
- Wear a tool glove on the 'helping hand', the hand not holding the tool.
- Use away from your body and keep the 'helping hand' away from the blades

Sheath Knives

- For whittling sticks
- Always replace the sheath when not in use, ensure sheath is correct way round (it will click when correct)
- When transporting, keep sheath on and knife pointing downwards, pass the tool handle first
- Wear a tool glove on the 'helping hand', the hand not holding the tool.
- Rest wood on the outer side of your leg, always whittle away from your body, taking small slivers of wood at a time
- Only use the tool when sitting or kneeling

Palm Drills/Gimlets

- For drilling holes in wood
- When not in use, place in the designated toolbox
- When transporting, keep drill pointing down, pass the tool handle first
- Wear a tool glove on the 'helping hand', the hand not holding the tool.
- Hold the wood down against a flat surface with your non-dominant hand, hold the palm drill handle in your palm and twist drill into the wood while applying pressure
- Only use the tool when sitting or kneeling

The Use and Movement of Natural Materials

The children are told that it is important to respect themselves, each other and the natural resources and environment. These are the fundamental principles to be applied with using and moving natural resources. They can only use items that are loose and not attached to the ground and they must not pull branches or sticks from living trees. Leaves and flowers can be collected in small number if there are more than 5 in that area.

“Sticks need space” is an important principle that the children are taught from the start of Forest School. This is to ensure their safety and that of others. Depending on how long the stick is determines how much space the stick needs. If the stick is shorter than their forearm, they are told to walk with the stick in front of them, but if it is longer than their forearm, they are told to carry it vertically, again for safety of those around them. Children must never run with a stick in their hand when in the wooded area due to the uneven ground and enclosed space.

All natural resources must be left in their Forest Schools area at the end of the session and no additional materials should be brought into the area to maintain to ecosystem and reduce the risk of non-native species being introduced. The only objects that can be removed are small items that have been crafted such as “wood cookies”. At present, as only one group uses the Forest School site at a time dens etc can be kept up at end of a session. However, this policy will be reviewed if more classes access the same site. All children will be informed that there can be no ownership with regards to natural resources and that we simply use the items for a time.

Manual Handling

Both Forest School Leaders are trained in Manual Handling, which is updated when needed.

- Moving things around such as tires, logs and sticks is unavoidable at Forest Schools, so the children are taught to do it safely.
- When lifting, always bend with the knees and keep the back straight. If lifting with
- A partner, communicate by saying “1, 2, 3, lift”, and when putting the object down, saying
- “3, 2, 1, down” as they are descending.
- If the object is curved, children are encouraged to roll it where they need to go, instead of trying to lift something heavy.
- Ropes can be used to pull objects from one place to the other.
- If the children cannot lift something, or if they at risk of causing injury, they will be sold to seek help from an adult, or consider whether the thing needs moving.

Tree Climbing

Children will be encouraged to keep their feet on the ground until they have been given the tree climbing talk to ensure their safety. Any children seen climbing before this time will be asked to come down and reminded of the expectations.

As part of the tree climbing policy children will be informed of the following guidance for their safety:

- Forest School Leaders will check the undergrowth and the stability of trees before the session when tree climbing is to take place. Any sharp objects will be moved away from the trees so reduce the risk of falling onto them.
- Climbers are allowed to climb as tall as the Forest School Leader (approx 1.5m)
- If children need a 'boost' or a 'leg up' from an adult, then that tree is too challenging for them to climb.
- They must be aware of the suitable "climbing trees" - these are trees with thick and low enough branches for the children to climb on.
- They are to have three points of contact with the tree they are climbing at all times.
- No one is allowed to climb any trees near the fire circle to reduce the risk of falling into the fire circle.

Toileting

Children are encouraged to go to the toilet before the Forest School session. If they do need the toilet during a session they will be escorted by an adult to the nearest accessible toilet next to the Staff Room. Shoes will be removed at the door to reduce the school getting muddy. Children are encouraged to be as quick as possible and once finished will return to the site.

Forest Schools

School-Family-Child Agreement

At Hursthead Junior School, we see Forest School Sessions as a collaboration between the school, family and children. Set out below are the responsibilities of each of the three parties.

The School	The Family	The Child
We will provide opportunities for children to learn and practice new skills in an outdoor setting.	We will talk to our children in advance of the Forest School sessions and encourage them to participate in the sessions.	I will remember my Forest School kit for each session.
We will provide an outdoor space that is stimulating, safe and inclusive and provide all tools and equipment that is required for the sessions.	We will ensure that our child attends each session with the appropriate clothing to ensure that arms and legs are covered to reduce scratches, waterproof layers are included.	During each session I will respect myself by listening to the Forest School Leader and keeping myself safe when taking risks.
We support the children's mental wellbeing by planning varied sessions that are fun, have elements of craft, opportunities for learning about the natural environment and include team games too.	We will ensure that our child has suitable footwear so that they can participate in the sessions and remain safe. Ideally this will be wellies or walking boots or alternatively old trainers.	
We will value each child, their individual skills and talents and ensure that all sessions are planned in a way that makes them accessible to all.	We will provide our child with a water bottle and ensure that hats/sun cream are provided during the summer months.	I will respect others, by which I mean my peers, the adults who are running the session, and the neighbours next to our Forest School site. I will do this by being kind, considerate and communicating well with others.
We will encourage children to try new activities but will always make sure that the sessions are child-led with opportunities for free play and exploration.	We will celebrate our child's achievements in the Forest School Sessions and engage in conversations with them about the activities and games they have played.	I will respect the environment and the things living within it. I will make sure that I leave the Forest School site as I found it leaving no evidence of me being there.
We will ensure that all children feel safe during the sessions and give them the opportunity to take controlled		

risks to increase their self-confidence.		
We will encourage creativity and allow children to work collaboratively on activities that they are engaged in.		
We will ensure that the Forest Schools leaders are fully trained, have up to date First Aid training and are DBS checked.		

I parent/carer consent to (child's name) participating in the Forest School Sessions at Hursthead Junior School.

I am aware that the sessions will include a variety of activities including den building, fire making, tree climbing, craft activities and the use of tools as well as free playtime and team games. I give my consent for my child to use the necessary tools under the supervision of the Forest School Leaders who will follow the Forest School policies and procedures. The tools may include hand drills, sheath knives, flints and steels, secateurs, hammers, bow saws and loppers. I am aware that risk assessments have been completed for all activities that take place and that these have been signed by the head teacher and all staff involved. All Forest School Sessions will take place on the grounds of the school site unless my specific consent is sought for an off-site trip.

Signed (parent/carer)

Name (print)

Signed (child)

Name (print)

Signed (Forest School Leader)

Name (print)

Pre-session site checklist

Date						
Check						
Weather forecast suitable and no high/gusty winds						
No obstacles in paths/remove						
No overhanging or broken branches/clip them back						
Dispose of any faeces or deceased fauna if any						
Remove any foreign/sharp objects						
No evidence of domestic animals onsite						
Boundary fence intact						
Boundary cones placed correctly						
Any stray ropes removed						
All dens safe and stable						
Equipment and tools for the session are safe and in good working order						

Before group leave school building:

- ✓ Number of children in attendance confirmed
- ✓ Children dressed appropriately in line PPE guidance
- ✓ Children toileted

Items to be taken out each session:

- ✓ Inhalers
- ✓ First aid kit
- ✓ Camera
- ✓ Water bottles
- ✓ Observation book
- ✓ Any materials/tools for craft and free play

Policies

1. Equality Policy

Forest School sessions at Hursthead Junior School are planned in a way that makes them engaging, accessible and exciting for children of all backgrounds and abilities. The free-play aspect of each session gives children the opportunity to explore the natural environment in their own unique way with few expectations or limitations placed upon them. The Forest School Leaders celebrate differences, encourage alternative approaches to problem solving and thereby promote inclusion.

Our standard school Equality Policy is adhered to and can be accessed by the link below:

<https://www.hursthead-jun.stockport.sch.uk/policies>

2. Anti-Bullying Policy

At Hursthead Junior School, and likewise at Forest Schools, bullying in any shape or form is not tolerated. We are mindful that the open and extensive site may make children more vulnerable to bullying and therefore very carefully monitor the play, language and behaviour of all the children during the sessions.

The school's Anti-Bullying Policy is strictly adhered to and can be accessed via the link

<https://www.hursthead-jun.stockport.sch.uk/policies>

3. Confidentiality and Data Protection

At Forest School, our standard school Data Protection and Confidentiality Policy will be adhered to and can be accessed by the link below:

<https://www.hursthead-jun.stockport.sch.uk/data-protection-gdpr>

4. Safeguarding Policy

The nature of Forest Schools lends itself to opportunities for conversations about emotional wellbeing between staff and children. All staff are therefore mindful of this, and are aware of how to respond if a disclosure is made. This is set out in the school's Safeguarding policy, which is available here:

<https://www.hursthead-jun.stockport.sch.uk/safeguarding>

5. DBS

All members of staff are DBS-checked and fully qualified to be working safely with children. At present, no volunteers work with us in Forest Schools.

6. Accident and Emergency Policy

In the event of an accident or an emergency the Forest School Leaders will follow the school policy “Emergency Procedures”. The Forest School Leaders will assess the situation and the extent of the accident or injury. Whilst doing this, a plan will be made to ensure that the any children not involved in the incident are safe and away from danger.

If a serious injury occurs in a way that cannot be treated on-site, an adult will contact the emergency services using a mobile brought on-site. The office would be contacted so the contacts of the injured party could be contacted. The rest of the group will be moved to a safe site and supervised while the injured party is tended to.

Once the emergency services have arrived the Forest School Leaders will coordinate the care of the injured party with other staff members. A member of staff will remain with the child at all times and will travel to hospital in the ambulance, should this be necessary. They will take with them the school mobile phone and continue to liaise with the child’s parents or carers. In the event of a serious injury/death, a RIDDOR record will be created.

<https://www.hursthead-jun.stockport.sch.uk/policies>

All information can be found in the First Aid policy.

7. First Aid Policy

At Forest School the safety of the children who take part in the sessions is of paramount consideration. The school First Aid policy will be followed and can be accessed via the link below.

Both the Forest School Leaders are first aid trained and have their outdoor and fire first aid certificate. First aid kits and burns first aid kits are taken out to each session and first aid can be administered on site. Due to the close proximity of the Forest School site to the school building, children can be escorted back to the building to get an ice pack should this be required. If any first aid is administered the relevant paperwork is filled in a filed with the School Office and parents will be informed. Any items of first aid that have been used from the kit, such as dressings or plasters, will be replaced as soon as the session is finished.

<https://www.hursthead-jun.stockport.sch.uk/policies>

8. Food Handling and Hygiene Policy

It is the responsibility of all members of staff working in Forest School to make themselves aware of any allergies, intolerances, cultural or health requirements that the children in the group may have. In any event, Hursthead is a nut-free school. All food that is to be used at Forest School will be stored carefully and appropriately to avoid contamination. Any food that requires refrigeration prior to the session is kept between 0 to 5 degrees Celsius. All use by or best before dates are checked before the session. All utensils and crockery will be checked

before use that they are clean. Food, crockery and utensils will be transported out to the forest in an airtight container to ensure they are kept clean. Children and adults will wash their hands before they touch food for preparation or cooking purposes. Cooking on a campfire will only be undertaken by a member of staff in possession of a Level 2 Food Hygiene Certificate. Any food that requires heating will be checked that it is sufficiently hot throughout before being consumed. All waste food will be disposed of in bins within the school building.

Lost/Missing Person

Throughout a Forest School session the Forest School Leader will carry out head counts to ensure all children are accounted for. As soon as it becomes clear that a child is missing the matter will be taken very seriously and the following steps will be followed:

Using the animal call all children will be gathered at the Fire Circle and a register will be taken to establish which child/children is/are missing.

A member of staff will remain at the Fire Circle and play a game with the group, keeping them calm and reassuring them. At no time must these children be left unsupervised.

A note of the time will be made.

All other members of staff will then search the Forest School area and playing field for 5 minutes and then return to the Fire Circle. If when they return the child/children is/are still missing the remaining children will be escorted back to their classroom.

Alert school office staff that a child is missing and organise a second search party. These members of staff will search the school grounds (including toilets, classrooms and all other spaces) and Forest School site for 10 minutes. They will then return to an agreed point.

If the child remains missing the police will be telephoned and informed that a child is missing. A call will be made to the child's parents/carers.

The search will continue until the police arrive and advise of the next steps.

Once the child has been located a full report will be completed using the Incident Form.

Insurance

The safety of our children is of paramount concern. Therefore we adhere to the limitations set out by the insurance we have for Forest Schools in our site. **(Insurance will be attached to the bottom of this handbook)**

Drafted June 2022

Edited December 2022

[Review on July 2023](#)

[I confirm I have read and understood this handbook](#)

Signed _____